

By Gionni

I was referred to the Boys and Girls Club of New Haven from juvenile probation to be a part of the Mentor To Win program and in the beginning I felt really awkward. I was around people who I had never met before and I was uncomfortable. I was also having a hard time dealing with the consequences of my action and felt I was there because I messed up. However, in time Mr. E and I began holding talking. We clicked right away and although initially I thought we were so different, through our conversation I realized we were more alike than I thought. We connected right away and our stories and backgrounds were so similar. It was easy to appreciate Mr. E's feedback. I felt like he got me. He really just listened. He also gave me advice on how to

deal with the issues I face on a day to day basis. I would think back to our conversations whenever I became angry or frustrated and it helped me to react to things differently.

Being from the Hill, a tough neighborhood in New Haven, I felt out of place when I began attending school in North Haven. It felt like no one would understand me or where I was coming from. Mr. E was always there after school at the Club to help me talk about my feelings, to remain positive and find ways to deal. He encouraged me and I started becoming more confident. My grades in school gradually got better and so did my attitude. I'm grateful to Mr. E. I didn't know what a mentor was before I became a member at the Boys & Girls Club. To me being mentor is being a friend, and that's what Mr. E is to me.

Mentor/ Staff Member:

Not only has Gionni benefitted from the program, it has so rewarding for me. I am deeply humbled by this great opportunity and chance to give back in this way. I ask each one of you in this room, if you can, please take time mentor a young person. You greatly impact a young person's life as well as your own.

Thank you for listening.